

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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NICK CARTER'S SLIPPERY QUARRY OR THE CASE AGAINST FRISCO JIM



BY THE AUTHOR OF NICK CARTER

NICK GAVE THE OTHER VILLAIN A RIGHT-HANDER THAT SENT HIM TUMBLING INTO A PILE OF BARRELS.

NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

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Nick Carter's Slippery Quarry;

OR,

THE CASE AGAINST FRISCO JIM.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

AN ALABAMA MURDER MYSTERY.

"I must have the letters, Cora."

"I don't like to part with them. You may be deceiving me."

"Deceiving you? How?"

"I may never see you again if I give up the letters."

"Nonsense," protested the man, who was slight and dark, with fierce black eyes and a nervous manner, "for you are the only one I love. I want the other's money, that's all."

"But your marriage with her will separate you from me, and that would kill me," faltered the girl, who was young and pretty; though her face was pale and careworn, and there were dark circles about her eyes.

"She will want a divorce quick enough when she finds me out," asserted the man, with a coarse laugh.

"And when will that be?"

"When I get hold of her money and light out for parts unknown."

The girl sighed.

"It's a pitiable and a shameful thing that I am linked to such a wretch as you are," she exclaimed. "I often wonder how I can love you when I know your baseness."

"I don't wonder," with a self-satisfied smile. "You love me because I look upon you as the dearest girl in the world, one whom I will never desert, and for whom I would make any sacrifice."

These words failed to impress the hearer. She shook her head sadly.

"Sacrifice!" she repeated. "And how much of a sacrifice are you making now?"

"My marriage will deprive me of your sweet society for a month—the period of the wedding tour."

The girl's brow darkened, and she bit her lip in angry displeasure.

"Is there no other way open to you?" she asked.

"Way for what?"

"To obtain money."

"No. I am down to my last dollar. If I don't marry this woman and get my hands on her boodle, I'll have to go to work shoveling dirt for a living, or else blow my brains out."

"The letters are all I have as a hold over you," said the girl.

The man could not repress a sneer.

"Hold over! Yes, and you stole them from me. Stole them when I was asleep."

The girl flushed, and she turned on him with something of anger upon her rather faded face, which, however, still showed the traces of more than ordinary beauty.

"Steal them! And if I did, I—I thought they were from her."

"Well, you know they're not now, don't you? Those letters ought to be destroyed and you know it. Come, Cora," with an attempt at tenderness, "you need no hold over me, as you call it. I care too much for you for that."

As she said nothing in reply, but stood with her eyes cast down, he went on, rapidly:

"You don't want to lose me, do you? You don't want me to go to California, China, or the end of the world, do you? Then brace up, Cora, and show your good sense. As I said before, my marriage will benefit you as well as me. I'll get rid of this woman in short order, and fly to you. Then we'll go to Europe, and when the divorce is granted—if she doesn't apply for one I will, and I know how to work a snap of that kind—I will marry you!"

Having made what he considered a most virtuous and unselfish concession, he folded his arms and waited for her reply.

"I'll get the letters," she said, in a low voice.

He drew a deep breath of relief, and drawing her to him, kissed her repeatedly.

"You're a jewel, Cora," he joyously uttered, "worth your weight in gold."

"I hope I shall not regret the action," she replied.

"You shall not, I swear it. When will you bring them?"

"To-morrow night."

"That will answer."

"Will this place do?"

"No. I will meet you"—he paused a moment as if for reflection—"down by the——" The remaining words were whispered in her ear.

Then they parted.

The spot where the foregoing interview had taken place was a narrow lane in the outskirts of Mobile, Alabama, and the time was between eight and nine o'clock in the evening.

There was but one building close by, and that was an old shanty that had once been occupied by a peddler.

It had been vacant for over a year.

The man and the woman had been gone about five minutes when the form of an old woman emerged from the shanty.

In her arms were a number of sticks and pieces of board which she had picked up in and about the deserted building.

Her attire was shabby, and she moved toward a hole in the fence with feeble, uncertain steps.

Arrived at an alley, she stopped a moment and listened intently.

Hearing nothing, she began to soliloquize.

"Knew him by ther voice, ther fust time he opened his mouth. What's ther scamp up ter, I wonder? Reckon 'tan't no good, no-how. Ther gal an't no bettern' she should be from what she said. 'N yit her voice sounded kinder sweet 'n appealin'."

The old woman shook her head and moved on.

Near one end of the alley she began feeling along the board fence until her trembling fingers encountered a latch.

"Pity I couldn't see her face," she muttered, as she went into the inclosure.

She was both old and blind.

Two days later Mobile had a sensation. The mangled corpse of a young woman was found in the river a few miles above the city.

The face was unrecognizable.

The body was brought to the morgue, and while the inquest was in progress, the chief of police entered, followed by a compactly built man, above the medium height, with keen eyes and prepossessing countenance stamped with intelligence and resolution.

Presently there came a lull in the proceedings.

The chief approached the coroner and whispered:

"What progress have you made?"

"None. The body has not been identified, and there was not a scrap of paper, an article of jewelry, or anything in the nature of a clue to be found about her clothing."

The chief's companion, who had been gazing at the corpse since his entrance, now approached the table where the coroner was sitting.

"Can't the inquest be adjourned for a while?" he said to the chief.

"Certainly. What have you discovered?"

"Nothing. But I might light upon a clue. I would like to make a short investigation."

"Very well."

The chief spoke a few words to the coroner, and the latter official, after nodding his head, dismissed the jury.

Then he arose to be introduced to the chief's companion, who was no other than Nick Carter.

The great detective had arrived at Mobile the afternoon before, in search of a noted

criminal known as James Aston, *alias* Frisco Jim.

A daring and successful bank robbery had occurred in Minneapolis a month before.

The perpetrators had covered up their tracks so well that the local detectives had only a bare suspicion to work upon.

The plunder had amounted to ninety thousand dollars.

Called into the case a fortnight after the robbery, Nick Carter had come to the conclusion that the master spirit of the robbery was Frisco Jim.

A week's patient investigation led Nick to believe that his quarry was in Mobile.

Thither he had come with a warrant in his pocket for the robber's arrest.

The morning after his arrival he had called at the office of the chief of police to renew an old acquaintance.

The chief was just then occupied with the tragic river mystery.

At his request Nick accompanied the officer to the morgue.

After viewing the body Nick's professional interest became aroused.

He had no thought of entering the case when he asked that the inquest be adjourned.

"I may discover something—there's no telling," he said to himself, "and if I do, the chief can take advantage of it."

As soon as the jurymen had gone out, Nick suggested that the dead girl's clothing be removed and that the body be laid out for the grave.

He had noticed, after entering the morgue, that there was an undertaking establishment next door.

The operation he suggested could therefore be quickly accomplished.

The coroner had no objection to make, and ten minutes afterward, while the undertaker's female assistant was occupied in dressing the body of the murdered girl in one

room of the morgue, Nick in the other was engaged in examining the victim's clothing, the chief of police and the coroner being intensely interested lookers-on.

Garment after garment was closely inspected and laid aside without anything of the slightest importance having been discovered.

At last the great detective picked up a white underskirt.

Some faint marks, which at first appeared to be dirt stains on the waistcoat, at once attracted his attention.

Bringing the skirt to the window where the light was strongest, and examining the stains closely, he soon became convinced that there were ink-marks among them.

There was a stationary washstand in the corner, and to that Nick went.

The chief's eyes brightened as he saw Nick take out his knife and cut the marked bit of the band from the skirt.

"What is it?" asked the coroner.

"I'll tell you as soon as I have washed the dirt out."

This operation concluded, Nick moved to the window again.

This time his inspection had a definite result.

There were unmistakable pen-marks on the band.

But they were so faint that nothing could be made of them.

Across the street from the morgue was a drug store.

Nick went over there, accompanied by the chief of police.

In the drug store the great detective obtained a reagent which, applied to the marks, brought them out more distinctly.

He then examined them through a magnifying glass.

"Well?" interrogated the chief of police, after Nick had gazed at the marks for a few

minutes without speaking. "Can you make anything out of them?"

"Yes. What I see is undoubtedly the remains of an indelible ink-marking, done with a pen in script."

"Initials, or a name?"

"A name was originally written, but only some detached letters are left. Look for yourself."

The chief took the magnifying glass, Nick holding the piece of skirt band, and looked long and intently at the distinguishable marks.

What met his eye were these letters, in the accompanying arrangement:

"C a cha ."

"Clara Richards," exclaimed the chief, quickly. "I might have guessed it."

Nick Carter asked, with an impassive face:

"Who is she?"

"A girl who disappeared from her home a week ago."

"How old was she?"

"Fifteen, but large and mature for her age."

"What was her station in life?"

"She was an orphan and an heiress, and belonged to one of the first families of Alabama."

"With whom did she live?"

"Her aunt."

"What facts have you gleaned concerning her disappearance?"

"These: She took the train for St. Stevens a week ago yesterday, telling her aunt that she was going to visit a schoolmate. She never arrived at St. Stevens, but was seen the day following her departure at Cold Creek, about twenty-five miles up the river, in the company of a young man. And that's the last trace I have of her."

"You saw her while she lived in Mobile, I presume?"

"Yes. And I might have identified the

body if her murderer had not crushed her head to a jelly."

"His desire must have been to destroy all evidences of the victim's identity."

"Undoubtedly."

The undertaker's assistant appeared at the door of the connecting room at this juncture.

She had dressed the body for the grave and was now ready to depart.

As soon as she had left the morgue, Nick said to the chief of police:

"I don't like to destroy this theory of yours, but I shall have to."

The chief looked at Nick in amazement.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the body is not that of Clara Richards."

CHAPTER II.

NICK CARTER'S GREAT LUCK.

Nick Carter spoke quietly, but with positiveness.

"How have you arrived at the conclusion that the murdered girl is not the missing heiress?" the chief of police asked, in strong curiosity.

"Let us view the corpse again before I answer."

They went into the other room.

"Now," said Nick, "look at the remains carefully. Observe the hands, the arms, the forehead, and the space about one of the eyes—the murderer has unintentionally left us some portions of the head intact—and tell me if you think the corpse is that of a girl fifteen years old."

There were incipient crow's feet about the eye that Nick designated, and the hands, instead of being soft and delicate, showed callouses and other evidences of toil.

"Your heiress had no serious troubles to harass her, had she?" queried Nick, as the

chief remained gazing at the body, with a wrinkled brow.

"No; she was as happy a girl as I ever saw."

"And she didn't do her own washing or split her own kindling wood, did she?"

"Of course not. She never did a stroke of manual labor in her life."

"This poor girl was not so fortunately situated," said Nick. "I knew she had been a working girl when I first looked at the body, and I knew also that she had seen trouble, while as for her age——"

"Yes, she must have been twenty-five at least," interrupted the chief. "But the marks on the skirt band—how do you account for them? Can it be possible that she wore one of Clara Richards' skirts?"

"The skirt never belonged to Clara Richards."

"Explain."

"Look at the letters again, chief."

The Mobile officer did as requested.

"Now," resumed the great detective, "you must perceive that the space between the 'C' and 'a' is too short to admit of 'lar,' the three letters required to make the word 'Clara.'"

"Yes, that is so."

"Again, if you put 'Ri' before the 'cha' on the band, you will make the space between the given and the surname greater than that usually employed."

"So it will, Mr. Carter."

"The conclusion is obvious, therefore," said Nick, as the chief concluded his examination, "that the girl's given name was shorter than Clara, while we may presume, with reason, that the first three letters of the surname are missing."

"How would 'Cora' do for the given name?" suggested the chief.

"It would do to a nicety. Now try a guess at the surname."

"Mouchard."

"That's the French for——"

The street door opened and a messenger boy interrupted Nick's speech.

"You're wanted at the office, chief," he said, addressing the head of the Mobile police department. "Boy about my size says his sister has deserted him, and that he fears that she has been murdered."

"What's the boy's name?"

"Burchard."

Nick Carter and the chief exchanged meaning glances.

"Doctor," said the chief, quickly, to the coroner, "I think you had better let the inquest go over until to-morrow morning."

"Very well."

Nick and the chief left the morgue together.

At the latter's office an intelligent lad of fourteen or thereabouts was found pacing the floor, his eyes red with weeping.

His story was soon told.

His parents were dead, and for a year he had been living with his sister, who was a seamstress, in an humble quarter in the city.

"Last night she made me go to bed early," the lad said, "as she expected company—some lady who was going to give her lots of work."

"I wasn't sleepy and I never went to sleep until after midnight. About half an hour after I had got into bed, I heard her crying and talking to herself in her room which was next to mine."

"Did you catch her words?" asked Nick Carter, as the boy paused to gulp down a sob.

"Yes—yes, sir."

"What were they?"

"She said she had thought the matter over, and that now she could not put any faith in his words."

"Whose words?"

"I don't know. Some fellow she used to meet around the corner."

"Did you ever see him?"

"Yes, sir; once."

"Do you know his name?"

"She called him Frank."

"Can you describe his appearance?"

"Not very well, for it was after dark when I saw him. He was kind o' skinny."

"Slender, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go on."

"And I reckon he had black hair and mustache, though they might have been brown."

"And his eyes?"

"Sharper than a gimblet. He looked as if he'd like to eat me up, when I told sis she'd better be chasing home pretty quick."

"Did he—the man—say anything to you?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"Told me I had a heap o' gall."

"What kind of a voice had he?"

"Man's voice, of course."

"I mean, was it light or deep, harsh or clear?"

"It was deep and clear."

Nick Carter's eyes twinkled.

The description had interested him greatly.

"Now," said he to the boy, "you may go on and tell us what else you heard your sister say in her room last night."

"She said something about a bundle of letters."

"That the man had written to her?"

"I don't know. She just said 'letters' and swore—not in cuss words, but the way women do—that she would never give them to him unless he gave her his solemn word, in writing—no more chin music for her—that he would marry her before he married the other woman, not after."

"What other woman?"

"She didn't mention any names."

The boy paused.

"Is that all?" asked Nick.

"That's all she said. Pretty soon afterward she left the house. First I had a notion to follow her, but I thought she'd give me fits if I did, so I stayed in bed."

The lad began to cry afresh.

"I wish I'd gone, now," he sobbed, "for I might have prevented that sharp-eyed fellow running away with her or hurting her."

There was a short pause.

Then Nick said:

"What was your sister's name?"

He guessed what the answer would be, and therefore was not surprised when the boy said:

"Her name was Cora."

The chief of police looked sorrowfully at the speaker, but did not open his mouth to reveal the terrible truth.

Nick proceeded with his questioning.

"Did your sister receive many letters?"

"She never got but one in the last year that I know of, and that one was from Minneapolis."

"From this man Frank?"

"Yes."

"Do you know anything about the bundle of letters she was talking about?"

"She got them about two weeks ago."

"All at a time?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"She came home one night with them. She seemed scared like, and sent me out of the room while she hid them away."

The great detective reflected for a moment.

If she brought them all at the same time, it was not likely that the bundle contained love letters.

And yet they must have been considered of great value by the man Frank, or, as the girl's words in her room indicated, he would not have been so anxious to reclaim them.

After the boy had told his story, Nick turned to the chief of police.

"I am beginning to be greatly interested in this affair," he said, "for it may be that it has a bearing on the matter that brought me to Mobile. With your permission, therefore, I would like to accompany this boy to his home and see if I can make any fresh discoveries there."

"If you would only take charge of the case I would be delighted, Mr. Carter," the chief quickly and earnestly replied.

"I will give you a decided answer before night," returned Nick.

At the house where the brother and sister had lived a search was made for the bundle of letters or other evidence that might tend to throw light on the murder.

Nothing was found.

It now became the detective's painful duty to inform the boy that he believed his sister had been foully dealt with.

He did this as gently as he could, and when the lad's paroxysm of grief had partially subsided, he asked him to step down to the morgue and view the corpse that had been found that morning in the river.

The boy trembled like a leaf when he gazed at the ghastly features of the dead woman, but he spoke no word until he had looked at the hands.

Then he tearfully burst out:

"It's Cora—for there is the scar from a knife-cut I gave her."

"You gave her?"

"Yes. She had my knife and wouldn't give it to me, and when I tried to take it away from her she got cut."

The clothes the dead woman had worn were brought in, and at once identified by the boy as having belonged to his sister.

That evening, while Nick was in the chief's office, a telegram was received by the latter.

It was from the Marshal of Dennard, in Monroe County, and conveyed this information:

"Clara Richards was married here yesterday by a traveling preacher to a man who gave his name as Frank Hurst. The pair did not remain in town, but left for parts unknown as soon as the ceremony had been performed. Have interviewed preacher, whom I ran across by accident. He says Hurst is a slight, dark young man with a deep voice and snapping black eyes."

"Just as I supposed," was Nick Carter's quick comment. "The man who murdered the poor seamstress, Cora Burchard, is the man who has married the heiress, Clara Richards."

The chief of police showed marked surprise at this assertion.

"But what was the motive of the murder?" he asked.

"He wanted the bundle of letters."

"And when Cora Burchard refused to give them up, he killed her, eh?"

"Yes."

A pause, the chief, meantime, looking at the floor in troubled thought.

Nick Carter divined what was passing in his mind, and smiled.

Finally the chief said:

"Look here, Carter, you've got to take the management of this case. I've got my hands full with other matters and—and you can lay all over me in——"

Nick raised his hand deprecatingly.

"Don't," he said, "for I won't listen to any disparagement of one of the best criminal officers in the South. But I will go into the case, though."

"Thank you."

"Not because I think you incapable of properly managing it, but for the reason that it has become involved in my case of the bank robbery."

"How?"

"Frank Hurst is one of the many aliases of Frisco Jim."

"You amaze me."

"It is a fact. Besides, the description of the man whom Cora Burchard used to meet evenings tallies with the description of my man, Frisco Jim, as does also the description contained in that telegram from Dennard."

"So the murderer is Frisco Jim," said the chief, musingly. "A tough customer, as cunning as a fox, and as deep as a well. You have a hard task before you, Carter."

"I know it."

"The evidence thus far obtained wouldn't convict him before a jury."

"No."

"If you could get hold of that bundle of letters you might have a case."

Nick Carter nodded his head.

Soon after he left the chief's office.

That evening telegrams with the murderer's description, and asking for his arrest, were sent out in all directions.

Nick Carter's assistant, Chick, in New York City, also received a telegram.

The great detective saw that this was apt to be an involved case and that he would probably need help.

The next morning Chick was a passenger on one of the trains bound South.

The inquest was concluded the following day. It had been so conducted that a verdict of death at the hands of some party or parties unknown was rendered.

Immediately after the inquest, Nick Carter walked away alone toward the northern part of the city.

Among the information in regard to the Minneapolis robbery that he had received before leaving New York was the fact that Frisco Jim had a brother living in Mobile.

Carter had been to the address given, only to find that the brother had moved.

Where he had moved to the present occupant of the house did not know, except that it was somewhere in the north quarter.

As he turned into Pearl street, Carter noticed an old woman standing on the corner, muttering and shaking her head, evidently in great distress.

Moved by that sympathy for those in trouble which has always distinguished him, Nick addressed her.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked.

The old woman started and turned her face toward him. As she did so, Carter perceived that she was nearly if not quite blind.

"I don't know, I don't know," she answered, with many shakes of the head. "I've lost Betty. Don't you see her anywhere?"

"I wouldn't know her if I did see her."

"She's tall and peart—black eyes and red cheeks. I had 'em when I was young. She's my daughter."

Nick cast his eyes up and down the street, but could see no young woman at all answering to the description.

"She is not here, I am afraid," he said.

"Oh, dear! oh dear! I dunno what ter do!"

"Give me your daughter's address and I'll have you driven there in a cab."

"But I can't spare ther money. I'm pow'ful short thataway."

"I'll pay for the cab," said Nick, kindly.

"Are you rich?" hesitatingly.

"I am not poor."

"Then you may do it, an' may ther Lord bless yer kind heart."

A passing cab was hailed, and then Nick asked for her address.

"Mistress Betty Hurst, 19 Franklin street."

Nick started at the name.

"Hurst," he repeated.

"That's it."

"What's your son-in-law's name?"

"William. Why, do you know him?"

"No," said Nick; then he added, quickly:

"I might know his brother."

The old woman's reply came in a fierce outburst.

"Ef yer do, I pity yer. He's a raskil of ther deepest dye. Git shet of him quick ef yer don't know ther kind of er man he is."

"Maybe I am mistaken. What is William's brother's name?"

"Jeems; an' he's only a half-brother."

If the old woman could have seen Nick Carter's face at that moment she might have doubted the sincerity of the words that fell from his lips when she spoke the name.

"No, it's another Hurst I knew. I am not acquainted with James Hurst."

"Yer lucky."

"Why, what has he done?"

"Don't ask me sich a question. He's done ev'ything bad, 'n nothin' good."

"Does he live hereabouts?"

"No. He comes 'n goes, an' yer never know whar ter find him. A day or two ago he was in Mobile."

"Did he call on you?"

"Me?" indignantly. "No, he knows better 'n ter come moseyin' aroun' my place."

"How do you know he was in Mobile, then?"

"I heered his voice one night."

"What night?"

"'Pears ter me yer mighty curious," the old woman replied.

"Your statement about this man aroused my curiosity," said Nick, politely. "I hope I haven't offended you?"

"No, not a mite, an' I've got no call ter be close-mouthed ter you as has treated me so purty, neither. Ther night I heard him was five nights ago. Lemme see—yes. This is a Thursday. 'Twas a Sunday night I heard him."

Nick started.

Cora Burchard was last seen alive on Monday night.

"Where was he?" the great detective asked.

"In a lane near my house. He was talkin' to a girl, 'n I pity ther girl."

"What did he say?"

The old woman remembered the conversation perfectly, and repeated it.

Nick's eyes shone with satisfaction.

He had found in this old woman a most important witness.

The cabman now exhibited signs of impatience, and Nick, having no other questions to ask, helped her into the vehicle.

The great detective got into another cab and was conveyed to a hotel.

He was in excellent spirits, for he had not expected to meet with such good luck when he started out on his stroll.

Frisco Jim, *alias* Frank Hurst, was William Hurst's half-brother, the mother of the two men having been married twice.

The murderer's family history was not known to any officer of the law but Nick Carter.

He had discovered it a few days before his arrival in Mobile, while hot on Frisco Jim's trail.

Nick had dinner at the hotel and then went into the reading-room to glance at the New York papers that had arrived that day.

He was running his eye over the news columns of the *Herald*, when a conversation between two gentlemen, sitting a few feet away, caught and riveted his attention.

"If the fellow was scheming to get the girl's money, he will meet with a crushing disappointment," remarked one of the gentlemen.

"Why?"

"Because Clara Richards—or Mrs. Hurst, to call her by her married name—will not have the disposal of her fortune until she becomes of age, six years hence."

"How is that? I thought her father declared in his will that she might come into possession of the estate when she married."

"So he did, but to-day a second and later will has been discovered. It is without qualifications as to marriage, and provides that the trustees, of whom I am one, shall pay her only an income of one hundred dollars a month while she remains under age."

"Where is the property located?"

"In and about Mobile."

"Perhaps some of it has already been sold."

"No; for I found the new will last night, and immediately took measures to prevent any sale of the real estate or the withdrawal of any of the money from the bank."

"Do you know where the girl is?"

"No; but I shall undoubtedly hear from her soon."

The conversation soon ended.

Nick Carter left the hotel after ascertaining that the gentleman who had furnished the information regarding the new will was Colonel Halsey, one of the leading lawyers of Mobile.

He went north again and put in an hour obtaining information as to the character and habits of William Hurst.

Every one gave him a good reputation for honesty and integrity, but no one could say that he was thrifty and industrious.

He was a great horse fancier, and though his trade was that of a carpenter, he seldom worked at it, preferring to roam about the country trading horses and barely making enough money to make both ends meet.

Nick took his cue accordingly.

Toward dark he appeared in front of the Hurst house, a small, shabby frame dwelling, with a yard filled with weeds, riding a fair-looking horse and leading another of uncertain age by the halter.

For this occasion the great detective had become a horse trader.

"Hey, there!" he called out. "Whar's ther boss?"

A slatternly looking young woman with black eyes appeared at the door.

"Does Major Hurst live yer?" inquired Nick, as he touched the sombrero which adorned his head.

"I reckon he does, stranger."

"Mout he be in?"

"He mout."

"Then gave him ther compliments of Pete Davy, an' give him t' understan' that Pete Davy 'ud like pow'ful well ter see him."

"Light an' come in," said the woman, after a sharp scrutiny of Nick's face.

"Much obleeged, but I reckon I won't bother yer."

"Got a horse ter trade?"

"Mout have."

"William got shet of his last horse yesterday."

"Got one ter sell, then."

"William's plumb broke."

"Mout trade fer a yaller dog—tell Bill ter mosey out an' look at ther nag."

The woman, who was William Hurst's wife, and the daughter of the blind woman, shrugged her shoulders and went back into the house, leaving the door open.

The great detective soon heard the voices of two or three men in excited conversation. Presently Mrs. Hurst reappeared.

"Bill will be yer in a minute," she said.

"Bully fer Bill."

"Says he mout make some kine of er trade ef yer plug kin travil."

"He's a nailer with a big N," asserted the pseudo horse trader, confidently, "an' kin go ten miles an hour all day."

The woman stepped down to the gate, looked at the "speedy" traveler, and shook her head doubtfully.

"Don't look like it," was her comment.

"Looks don't count in horses," said Nick, confidently.

"He's as old as I am."

"Sixteen's not old, and besides, ther nag's only fourteen."

The woman smiled at the flattery.

"I'll hurry Bill up," she replied, and again went into the house.

Nick Carter waited five minutes, wondering what all this delay could mean, at the end of which time three men emerged from the door and came down the walk.

As they drew near, the foremost at once attracted Nick Carter's attention.

He was of medium height, stoutly built, and wore heavy black whiskers.

The great detective gave one quick glance at the man, and could scarcely repress a start of astonishment.

For, in spite of the padded form and the whiskers, Nick recognized the man by his eyes and nose.

It was the bank robber and murderer, Frisco Jim.

CHAPTER III.

A STREAK OF BAD LUCK.

Nick Carter had no expectation of finding Frisco Jim at his half-brother's house.

The most he had hoped for was the discovery of the murderer's whereabouts by working his points cleverly with William Hurst.

There was one plausible explanation of the villain's appearance back in Mobile.

Frisco Jim had learned of the existence of the new will which prevented him from carrying out the scheme to rob his wife, had deserted her, and was now at his half-brother's house for a rest long enough to permit him to concoct some new scheme of villainy.

The murderer of Cora Burchard, in spite of his shrewdness and cunning, had one weak spot in his armor, and Nick knew where it was.

He was an inveterate gambler, and he seldom wooed the seductive goddess of chance with coolness or caution.

The sight of a game of cards sent him from a state of calmness into a mad, reckless fever,

which subsided only when he found himself without a dollar.

Judging from Frisco Jim's past experiences, Nick believed that the murderer had squandered his share of the Minneapolis bank plunder before he reached Mobile and resumed his acquaintance with Clara Richards and Cora Burchard.

"Mout you be Bill Hurst?" the great detective asked, as Frisco Jim saluted him with a "howdy, stranger."

"No, this is Bill here," indicating one of his companions.

"Oh!" grunted Nick. "Wa'al, Mr. Hurst, reckon as how I mout come to a trade with you with this 'ere horse."

"An't got no money," answered Bill Hurst, a stockily-built fellow of thirty or thereabouts.

"Psho! yer don't say so," ejaculated Carter, with admirably feigned disappointment.

"Perhaps I mout buy yer plug if he suits," said the one the detective knew to be Frisco Jim, after a pause.

Nick's face brightened.

"Hope yer will, fer the ole 'ooman is sick, and I've got to get home right away, stranger."

"An' yer need money for medicine an' sich, eh?"

"You've plumb struck it."

Frisco Jim went outside the gate and looked at the led animal.

"He's mighty old," with a shake of the head.

"Shucks, man, he's good fer ten year, an' go—he kin git away with any ten-year-old in Mobile."

"Fast traveler, eh?"

"You bet."

Nick had got the horse from a livery man who gave a guaranty that it could make a mile in three minutes.

"Willin' ter let me try him?" asked Frisco Jim.

"Certainly. You may take a spin around ther block ef yer want."

"All right."

This was exactly what Nick Carter wanted.

It was his game to get Frisco Jim away from the others. Not that he was the least afraid to tackle him then and there, for superior numbers had no terrors for Carter.

On more occasions than one he had fought and fought successfully when the odds were three to one and more against him.

But he reflected that it would be very unwise to let his companions know that Frisco Jim had been arrested. There were others concerned in the Minneapolis robbery, and should they know that their leader was in custody, it would be at once to give them the alarm, and offer them the opportunity of taking to their heels.

The great detective was too clever in his business to be guilty of the mistakes that are so frequently made by over-zealous officers of the law.

He believed in being thorough; in never clapping the irons on a man until, in professional parlance, he had him "dead to rights."

Frisco mounted the horse, which was provided with a saddle, and started off.

Nick followed by his side.

"Goin' with me?" said Frisco Jim, in surprise, real or feigned.

"O' course. Business is business, an'—you bein' a stranger——"

"I see," interrupted the other, with a smile.

"I mean no offense, stranger."

"None is taken. Hyar we go."

And away they went at a gallop.

The horse Frisco Jim bestrode did not belie the reputation Nick had given him, and when the twain had ridden half a mile from the house, the disguised murderer suddenly reigned up and said:

"I'll take him if the price suits. How much do you want?"

Nick had paid forty dollars for the animal, and was quite willing to part with it for the same sum.

"Forty dollars is the price, stranger."

Frisco Jim, after some parleying, agreed to pay it.

He had his purse out and was about to open it, when Nick said, hurriedly:

"Put up your purse and let's ride a bit farther down ther road."

As he spoke the words, he began to urge his animal forward.

Frisco Jim gazed at him with eyes of suspicion.

"What for?" he demanded.

"Because," replied Nick, with every symptom of uneasiness, "thar's some men up ther street lookin' fer me thet I don't keer erbout meetin'."

Frisco Jim smiled and rode up to the disguised detective's side.

He thought he had a shrewd idea of the cause of the horse trader's perturbation.

They galloped rapidly until they had passed the city's boundaries, and then turned down a lane that ran along the edge of a swamp.

At last Nick reined up his horse, with a deep breath of relief, and turned to his companion.

"You stole that horse," said Frisco Jim, bluntly.

Nick frowned, and then his eyes sought the ground.

"Ef I did," he said, in a low voice, "it was because I was forced to."

"What forced you—want of rocks?"

"Yes. Ther ole 'ooman is sick, as I tole er, an'——"

"That yarn won't wash. You can't work any old woman racket on me."

"Then I'll work this," said Nick, and lean-

ing forward with surprising suddenness, he hurled Frisco Jim violently from the saddle.

As the man struck the ground, Nick Carter was on top of him.

A few blows of the kind the great detective knew how to administer when occasion required and the murderer and bank robber lay without sense or motion.

About the time Nick had finished tying him up, he opened his eyes.

There was a look of mingled rage and terror in them, for his first thought was that his disguise had been penetrated, and that his assailant was an officer.

"What does all this mean?" he gasped, speaking in his natural voice.

Nick made no reply but began to search his victim's pockets.

He had examined purse and pocketbook, and had turned out on the ground nearly five hundred dollars in gold and bank notes, and had his hand on a bundle of letters, when the sound of horses' hoofs near at hand made him look up with a start.

At the same instant Frisco Jim shouted at the top of his voice:

"Kill him! He's robbing me."

Nick thrust the bundle of letters into his pocket and leaped to his feet.

Three horsemen confronted him.

Each was armed with a rifle, and each rifle was pointed at his breast.

The men's faces were stern and resolute.

"Throw up your hands," exclaimed one of them, "an' be mighty spry erbout it."

Nick made a virtue of necessity.

But as his hands went up, he said, boldly and impressively:

"You are making a mistake. I am no robber. The robber is there," pointing to Frisco Jim's prostrate form.

"Rats!"

"He is Frisco Jim, and he is wanted for murder and robbery."

"Don't you believe him," said the man thus denounced, in an eager, pleading tone. "He is Frisco Jim himself."

One of the horsemen dismounted and approached the now angry detective.

"Keep yer guns leveled on him," he said to his two companions, "an' if he makes a single move ter play a monkey trick with me or git erway, plug him."

The speaker laid his rifle down and drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

"I'm ther constable of this parish," he explained, "and I reckon I'll take you ter town an' let yer do yer explainin' afore ther jestice o' the peace."

Nick had no objection to this plan of procedure, provided Frisco Jim was not allowed to escape.

"You will take that person I have called Frisco Jim along with me, I suppose?" he asked, as he put out his hands and allowed the constable to affix the steel bracelets.

"Of course. How are we goin' ter fine out which is ther liar onless we do?"

Frisco Jim groaned.

"I am a gone coon if they yank me into town and give this detective a chance to get in his fine work on me," he muttered under his breath.

But he could see no way out of the difficulty, until the constable cut the cords which bound him and encircled his wrists with a pair of handcuffs.

His hands were long and slender, and he rarely found the handcuffs that he could not slip out of.

The constable gathered up the money that lay on the ground, and then Nick was lifted to the saddle of his horse and placed in charge of one of the posse.

Frisco Jim's animal was nowhere in sight, having galloped away when the murderer was assaulted.

"I reckon I'll have to take you up behind me," said the constable.

Frisco Jim lowered his head in order that the officer might not see the evil sparkle of his eyes.

In a few minutes the party were on the move.

Nick Carter and his custodian rode in advance, side by side.

Behind them came the constable and Frisco Jim.

The third member of the constable's posse brought in the rear.

The horses went forward at a walk.

Before fifty yards had been traversed, Frisco Jim's hands were free.

A moment later, when the road was about to emerge from the thick woods which bordered the swamp into the open country, he prepared to act.

One glance over his shoulder showed the rear horseman with one hand on the bridle rein, the other holding his rifle across his lap.

Then, with a wild yell that would have done credit to a Comanche, he leaped from the horse's back and darted into the bushes.

The horses plunged about in mad excitement, making it impossible for the constable or his men to use their rifles.

Sheltered by the broad trunks of the trees, the bullets, when they did come, failed to reach the body of the fugitive.

Leaving Nick in the care of the man by his side, the constable and the second man left their horses and pursued the murderer on foot.

But Frisco Jim had got such a start, and the underbrush was so thick that they never once got sight of him.

After an hour's search, they returned to the road.

Their failure to recapture the slippery villain filled Nick Carter with disappointment and wrath.

"Now," he said, in anything but a pleasant

tone to the constable, "I hope you are satisfied of your mistake."

"I'm pretty near it, I reckon," was the meek reply, as he mopped his perspiring brow with his bandana.

"I had just arrested him and was searching him for incriminating evidence when you and your men came up," said Nick.

"Who are you, anyway?"

The great detective gave the required information, and supplemented it with documentary proof.

The constable, who knew Carter by reputation, was profuse in his apologies.

He quickly liberated Nick, and then proposed that the latter should go to the nearest saloon where he would be delighted to "set 'em up" until the matter was squared.

"Much obliged," said Nick, quietly, "but my business just now is in that swamp."

"You'll never find him."

"I can try."

"Then we'll take a try with you."

But the enterprise was begun too late, and after several hours' search, Nick gave it up and returned to Mobile.

Before he retired to rest, he took out the bundle of letters he had taken from Frisco Jim's person.

They were the documents he had been looking for and which he firmly believed would furnish a strong motive for the murder of Cora Burchard.

CHAPTER IV.

CHICK ON THE TRAIL.

Upon the outside envelope, in a different handwriting from the address, were these words of explanation:

"These letters I took, this 5th day of October, 1893, from Frank Hurst. I read them under the mistaken impression that they were written by a woman whom I hate.

"CORA BURCHARD."

"A woman whom she hated," mused Nick,

as he turned over the bundle in his hands. "Must have been Clara Richards. A case of jealousy, probably.

"But Clara Richards did not write them. Who did, then? 'Took?' Humph! that probably means she stole them."

In which conjecture, as we know, the detective was correct.

Having worked his curiosity up to the proper pitch, Nick took out his knife to cut the string that held the letters tightly together.

At that moment there came a sharp rap at his door.

Nick thrust the bundle into his pocket and called out, sharply:

"Who's there?"

"Me, sir," piped a small boy's voice. "Constable Hewitt sent me."

Hewitt was the name of the officer who had figured so prominently in the affair near the swamp earlier in the day.

The great detective did not open the door, however, until he had drawn his pistol and prepared for a possible surprise.

But when he found himself confronted by a mite of a boy, apparently not more than seven years old, he smiled.

In reality, the youngster was eleven. He was poorly clad, and had a sharp, intelligent face.

Holding out a folded note, he said, with eyes cast down:

"Constable Hewitt he told me to come up here and give you this."

Nick looked up and down the corridor as he took the note.

No one was in sight.

The message contained these words:

"MR. CARTER:—Have caught Frisco Jim. Had to shoot him in the lung before he'd surrender. He wants to see you. Come to the jail.

B. J. HEWITT."

All this was concise and regular.

But the news seemed too good to be true.

How could the capture have been effected unless the murderer had returned to town after dark?

To do this would be a foolhardy undertaking, and the great detective could assign no plausible reason for it.

He resolved to question the boy a little before he ventured out.

"Do you know what is written in this note?"

"No, sir."

"How did you come to get it?"

"Mr. Hewitt gave it to me."

"Where?"

"Near the jail."

"What were you doing near the jail this time of night?" It was after eleven o'clock.

"I'd been to night school and was going home."

"Does Mr. Hewitt know you?"

"Oh, yes, sir. He's my uncle."

"Oh!"

"Uncle didn't come himself," the boy went on, now lifting his eyes, "because he didn't like to leave the jail. He would have come, though, if he hadn't seen me."

"Did he tell you that he had made a capture this evening?"

"Yes, sir. He said that he'd shot a bad man what had robbed and killed people."

Nick was nearly, but not quite satisfied.

It was hardly the proper thing to send a little boy on such an errand.

Still a fair explanation had been made for the course.

Nick considered a few moments before he announced his decision.

"I reckon I won't go," he said.

The boy looked up in surprise.

"Go back to the jail and see Constable Hewitt and tell him he must come here to me. I'm very busy and can't leave for an hour."

The boy lowered his eyes but did not move.

"That's all," continued Nick, and he put his hand on the knob of the door to shut it.

"Uncle won't like it," said the boy, in a whisper.

"Can't help it."

"He said you'd jump and run for the jail when you read the note."

"Tell him I've got the rheumatism and can't jump," replied Nick with a smile.

"All right, sir."

The boy walked away.

Nick watched him until he had passed out of sight and begun to descend the stairs.

Then he softly followed him.

"I'll soon discover whether he has told the truth or not," was his thought.

When the great detective opened the street door, he saw the boy hurrying along the sidewalk not twenty feet away.

Nick watched him until he turned a corner.

Then he stole quickly after the youngster.

The latter went down the side street, turned another corner, and then started on a run in the direction of the jail.

Half a block from the jail the great detective found the roadway and sidewalks partially obstructed.

The sidewalks were being improved with asphalt and were closed with a temporary fence, while the sides of the road were covered with boxes and barrels.

Nick was moving along with one eye on the boy and the other on his surroundings, when a stone whizzed past his head.

It had been thrown by some person behind him.

Quick as a flash he turned, pistol in hand, when another and a larger stone hurled by an enemy in the rear, reached its mark and made him stagger forward, faint and dizzy.

Before he could recover his scattered senses two dark forms were upon him.

Taken at a terrible disadvantage, Nick Carter yet struggled with desperate energy.

Suddenly he received a blow which gave him a peculiar sensation.

He had been stabbed.

At the moment the knife stroke was given his hands were clutching the throat of one of his assailants.

Instantly relaxing his grasp, he summoned all his force into one blow and stretched the fellow senseless at his feet.

The other villain stood at his side with the knife raised for a second murderous assault, when Nick suddenly lowered his head, and sending it forward, struck the assassin in the pit of the stomach, causing him to double up and utter a howl of pain.

Before he could straighten up, Nick gave him a right-hander and sent him tumbling among the pile of barrels.

The great detective now felt that his strength was leaving him.

He knew that he was badly wounded, for besides the faintness that was stealing over him, he could feel the blood trickling down his legs.

An attempt, then, to arrest the villains who had assaulted him would be useless.

The one he first knocked down was attempting to rise to his feet as Nick staggered down the street in the direction of the jail.

If he could only reach the place and ring the bell he would be safe.

But his knees gave way under him before he had taken twenty steps.

His brain was in a whirl as he sank to the ground, but he had sense enough to do one thing.

Thrusting his hand in his pocket, he drew out the bundle of letters and pushed them under an empty box close to his head.

Then he made a last effort and crawled several yards away from the spot.

His last remembrance of the happenings of that night was the sound of feet behind him

and the savage voice of Frisco Jim speaking to his comrade.

"Come on, Jack. We've got him now, curse him."

Then consciousness left him.

Hours afterward, close upon morning, he awoke in the jail office.

He was lying upon a lounge, and a surgeon and Constable Hewitt were standing before him.

His wound had been dressed, and he felt no pain, though he was very weak.

The events which had followed his fall in the street were quickly told in response to his eager questions.

The constable had been out in the country in pursuit of a horse-thief, whom he had succeeded in arresting, and was on his way to the jail with his prisoner, when he caught sight of two men stooping over the prostrate form of a third.

He had instantly hurried to the spot.

Before he reached it the two men fled.

He fired several shots after them, but none took effect, and he did not pursue them, as he had the horse-thief on his hands.

"When I found that the man on the ground was you, Mr. Carter," the constable went on, "I guessed in a second that Frisco Jim was one of the scoundrels who had assaulted you.

"I got you to the jail, went for a doctor, and then started out in search of the two rascals, but I couldn't find hide nor hair of 'em. The darkness was against me, you understand."

Nick nodded his head.

Then he thought of the bundle of letters, and at once asked that an immediate search be made for it.

He described the place where he had thrust it, and the constable at once set out to find it.

At daylight he returned with a disappointed face.

He had turned over every box and barrel on the street and had failed to find the bundle.

"I don't think it has fallen into the hands of Frisco Jim or his pard," he said, consolingly. "Probably some rag man or trash hunter—they are early birds, you know—has picked it up."

"I hope so," said Nick, but he had his doubts on the point.

It was a fortnight before the great detective was able to attend to business.

The knife had just missed his heart, and the wound was an ugly one.

But while he was convalescing he learned that the boy who had delivered the note—written beyond a doubt by Frisco Jim—was the son of William Hurst.

He had left Mobile on the night of the assault, and his father and mother claimed to know nothing of his whereabouts.

"As for me, I never want to see the brat again," said his father to Nick, who had sent for the horse trader in order to interview him, "for he's bound to follow in his Uncle Jim's footsteps. If I had known Jim was in town last night, I'd have marched him to jail in short order, if he is my brother."

Nick did not believe him, though he said nothing that would lead Hurst to suspect that he doubted him.

But before this still more important events occurred.

Two days after the assault upon Nick Carter, Chick arrived in Mobile.

It is needless to say that, in his helpless plight, the great detective received his subordinate with open arms.

And Chick brought important news.

After Carter's departure from New York, his assistant had been employed in hunting down one Jack Burry, who was more than suspected of being Frisco Jim's accomplice in the Minneapolis robbery.

That worthy himself Chick did not discover, but he found a former pal of Burry's who, being sick and "down on his luck," was

willing to assist justice for a pecuniary consideration.

Chick furnished the consideration in the shape of twenty dollars, and the man then stated that Burry, some ten days previous, had gone to Meridian, Miss., to work a game which his partner had laid out.

The informer could not give the name of this partner, but he suspected that it was Frisco Jim.

In speaking of this scheme, however, he had heard Jack Burry mention a man named Onderdonk.

Chick was about to send this information to his chief when he received the dispatch summoning him to Mobile.

"There is but one thing to be done," said Carter, after he had listened attentively to his assistant's report, "you must go to Meridian at once."

"But leave you in this condition?"

"Nonsense, my boy; I'm very well taken care of. Business before everything else."

And so to Meridian Chick went.

His first care was to inquire for a man named Onderdonk. He was told that the only man of that name in town was a hardware merchant on Jackson street.

Chick had no difficulty in finding the place.

As he entered the shop, his ears were saluted by a violent commotion, and he saw a stout, red-faced man wringing his hands in a state of uncontrollable excitement.

"Mein Gott, mein Gott! I was ruint—I peen schwintled all to bieces."

Chick caught the excited German by the arm with the quick question:

"Who swindled you?"

"Von Chew peddler."

Then he added, in a ferocious rage:

"Oof I Gould gatch dot reskil, I vood preak efery pone mit his pody alretty, so quick I vould mage your head got a schwimmin dot's so."

Chick became intensely interested at once.

"What kind of a cart and horse did the peddler drive?" he asked.

"Vot gind? Vy, yust a sbring vagon mit a ret pody und creen veels, und a horse vat was strawperry sorrel, mit a pop-dail und der springhald."

"And the peddler himself? Can you describe him?"

"He vas a Chew. Don'd I say so once?"

"Short or tall? Stout or slender?"

"He was schmall."

Chick looked disappointed.

Jack Burry was a tall man.

"Stout?"

"Nein. He vas schlim like a rail."

Chick's eyes began to twinkle.

"And his eyes? Did you notice them?"

The German gave a snort.

"Nodice dose eyes—I pet your life dot I nodice dem. Dey was so sharb dot he good pore holes mid dem."

"His voice was heavy, wasn't it?"

"Yaw, but glear and schweet, so schweet"—with a sigh—"dot you would think to hear dot veller dot putter wouldn't meld by his mout alretty. But who you vas, onnerhow?" concluded the narrator, as he looked at Chick sharply.

"I am a detective," replied Young Hercules, quietly.

"Den sit down und I tell you about it."

Chick obeyed only too gladly.

No doubt existed in his mind as to the identity of the swindler.

It was Frisco Jim.

CHAPTER V.

FRISCO JIM ON A NEW LAY.

A week before Chick's arrival at Meridian, the German, whose family consisted of a wife and grown-up daughter, was waited upon by a tall young man of respectable appearance, who desired to know if he had any rooms to rent.

Onderdonk owned the building in which he carried on his business.

On the first floor was his hardware store.

There was six apartments above, three of which were occupied by himself and family.

"I haf von room—yaw," he replied.

The young man looked at it, was satisfied, and paid a month's rent in advance.

He said he was a speculator, and that he operated in Mobile and New Orleans.

Two days passed, and the young man, who had an agreeable address, had worked himself into the good graces of Onderdonk and his wife. The daughter was harder to please.

On the third day, after he had learned by adroit question that the German had eighteen thousand dollars in bank, he told Onderdonk that if he had a little more money he could become rich in a week.

Mrs. Onderdonk, who was present, asked quickly:

"Vat would make you rich?"

"Gold dust," was the earnest reply. "There's a mint in it."

Soon after he took his leave.

After he had gone, Mrs. Onderdonk asked her husband if gold dust was worth anything.

"Wort anything?" he retorted, with a sniff of contempt at her ignorance. "Vy, it's yust der same as golt."

Katrina, the daughter, who had received a fair education, expressed the opinion that Mr. Lavalley, the lodger, was a "smoother."

"Pish!" snapped her father. "You tink you know eferyting dot vas, yust pecause you vas been py dot schgool-house last year a view dimes alretty. Und here is your olt vader und mudder vot's been knogin' apoud der vorlt for more as foofty years."

Katrina was about to retort that all this knocking about hadn't knocked any sense into her father's head, but she refrained.

Lavalley, the lodger, who was no other than Jack Burry, introduced the subject of gold dust the next day when Katrina was out.

He told the unsuspecting and gullible couple that an old schoolmate had just arrived from Russia with many bags of gold dust which he had bought very cheap from the Russian mine owners.

"He might sell it at some bank," the smooth schemer went on, "but he is under a cloud—he committed an indiscretion of some kind before he left New Orleans for Russia—and he is afraid to show his face at any bank for fear the police might spot him."

"Vere does he lif?" asked Onderdonk.

"In Mobile, and if you'll go over there with me, I'll introduce you, and he will show you the stuff."

"Nein," said Mrs. Onderdonk. "If he wants to sell led him coom ofer here. An'd dot so, vader?"

"Yaw!" said Onderdonk, with a business-like air.

"Very well," replied Lavelle. "But he will have to come in disguise."

"I don't care apoud dot oof he prings der golt tusd," said the German.

The next day the friend of Lavelle appeared in front of Onderdonk's establishment as a Jew peddler.

Lavelle had furnished the outfit and brought him over.

A small canvas bag was taken out of the wagon and brought into the German's living room, upstairs.

Lavelle opened the bag and took out a handful of the gold dust.

"That's the stuff," he cried, "that makes the gold-pieces."

Onderdonk's eyes glistened, and he began to breathe heavily.

His wife stood gazing at the dust with parted lips and an expression of mingled avarice and greed written on her face.

Suddenly she began to shake her head.

"It loogs all righd und maype dot it vas all righd," she said, "bud I vas no shudge oof dose tings, mein frent."

Lavelle smiled.

"Of course not. Let your husband take this handful out and have it tested. Then if the outcome is satisfactory, we will talk business."

"Dot's der dictet," remarked Onderdonk, approvingly. "Pe zure you vas righd vonce, den speild aheat quick."

The handful of dust was put in a cup and the German went out with it.

While he was gone, Lavelle entertained Mrs. Onderdonk with stories of his adventures among the Indians of Arizona, where he claimed to have mined for gold.

The German came back in half an hour, his countenance beaming with satisfaction.

"Der chenooine pizness!" he exclaimed. "I vent to dot cheweler on the next street, und he monkeyed mit it avile and den said dot vas golt sure."

Frisco Jim, the false peddler, who had not had much to say up to this time, now put in a word.

"I've got two other bags of the dust," he remarked, "and all together they are worth twenty-eight thousand dollars. Whoever buys must take the lump."

"How much you vant for dot lumb?" asked Onderdonk.

"Twenty-two thousand."

"We halfen't so mooch money as dot," said Mrs. Onderdonk.

Frisco Jim appeared to reflect.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said, suddenly. "I'll take out some of the dust and then give you the three bags for twenty——"

"All we god vas eighteen tousand tollars," interrupted Onderdonk, quickly.

"Well, let it go at eighteen. I'm in a corner, or I wouldn't throw away good money in that style."

He said the other bags were in the wagon, and being anxious to conclude the bargain that day in order that he might take the next

train for New York, he induced Onderdonk to go at once to the bank and draw the money.

The German, while eager to make the trade which promised him such a rich profit, did not favor this precipitancy.

"Vaid dill to-morrow," he said, "und gif me dime to sleep ofer it alretty."

"I would be glad to accommodate you," said the smooth Frisco Jim, "but there's a man in Mobile who will take the stuff for seventeen thousand any minute, and as I want to take that train——"

"Yawcob," put in Mrs. Onderdonk, before the schemer could finish the sentence, "oof you led dis chance go away, I'll nefer speak mit you again of you lif to be a tousand years."

"Ton't got oxcided, Loweesa," rejoined her husband, humbly. "I vas only waiting to maig a tousand tollars more alretty."

Then he said to Frisco Jim.

"I gif you seventeen tousand to-day, Dake it or leafe it."

Lavalle and the false peddler conferred together in a corner of the room.

The Onderdonks gazed at them with anxious eyes.

Frisco Jim finally heaved a sigh and then came toward his victims.

"All right," he said. "Seventeen thousand goes."

Lavalle went downstairs, soon returning with the other bags.

He opened both and allowed Onderdonk and his wife to look at their contents.

"All the same," said Lavalle, "and all came from the same mine."

Satisfied that everything was on the square, the German went out to get the money.

Inside of an hour the transfer was made.

Lavalle went off with the peddler, promising to return at nightfall, and give some advice relative to the disposal of the dust.

He did not keep his promise.

The next day—the day of Chick's arrival—the Onderdonks discovered that they had been robbed.

Katrina, the daughter, had opened their eyes.

Her parents did not inform her of the investment they had made until late in the forenoon.

The unaccountable absence of Lavalle, who had not remained away a single night since his occupation of the room in their building, filled them with uneasiness.

Katrina suspected something amiss, and when at last her father told her of the gold dust speculation, she at once expressed the opinion that they had been taken in.

"You have sneered at my education a great many times lately," she said to her father. "Now I am going to show you that I have not been to school for nothing."

Onderdonk looked at her with an uneasy smile.

She left the house, went to a drug store, got some acid, and returning to her house, asked that the bags be placed on the table.

The first one was that from which the handful had been taken for the jeweler's test.

Katrina scooped out several other handfuls, looking at each carefully, and then said:

"All this is gold, and is worth a couple of hundred dollars, probably."

Mrs. Onderdonk smiled at her husband.

"But the remainder is not gold."

"How you know dot?" asked her father, sharply.

"Wait and I'll tell you."

Katrina poured out another handful from the bag, applied the acid, and then pointed to the result.

The metal had turned black.

"Gold doesn't act that way," she said, quietly. "These are nothing but brass filings."

"Mein Gott!" cried her father. "Und dose

odders," pointing to the two other bags, "are dey prass, doo?"

Katrina's test proved that they were.

Mrs. Onderdonk put her hands to her face and went to her bed-room, sobbing and moaning.

Onderdonk rushed into the street, to be met by Nick Carter's faithful assistant.

Before the German had finished his story, Katrina came into the room with an announcement that fell upon Onderdonk like a thunderbolt.

His wife was dead.

The shock had augmented an old heart trouble, and she had expired soon after reaching her room.

CHAPTER VI.

CHICK CHECKMATED.

After leaving the Onderdonks, Chick went at once to the railway station.

With the ticket seller he met with no success. That functionary declared positively that no two men answering to Chick's description had purchased tickets of him.

An interview with one of the porters, however, was much more satisfactory.

Late the night before, two men, one tall and one shorter, of slender build and with piercing eyes, had driven up to the station in a buggy.

They had been very angry when they discovered the ticket-office closed and the last train gone.

As they were inveighing against their luck, a woman approached and addressed them.

The man with the piercing eyes exclaimed "Clara!" as he perceived her, and then swore a tremendous oath.

"Did you hear her reply to his salutation?" asked Chick of the porter.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"She said, kind o' cryin' like, that she'd

taken him for better or worse and was going to follow him to the ends of the earth."

"Ah, ha! And what did he say to this?"

"'Come along, then,' says he, in a gruff tone. 'You can go with us to Mobile, anyhow.'"

"Then all three got into the buggy and drove off."

Chick lost no time in securing a saddle-horse and following the route taken by his quarry.

Just before nightfall, and when within a short distance of a farm-house, he met a boy trudging along the road with a rake over his shoulder.

Chick halted him and asked a few questions.

The answers delighted him beyond measure.

The boy had seen two men and a woman enter the farm-house not fifteen minutes before.

"Did they come in a buggy?" asked Chick. "No; on foot."

Chick now asked for their descriptions.

They fitted Frisco Jim, Jack Burry and the woman, Clara, perfectly.

Leaving his horse in a hollow, the young detective walked up to the front door of the house.

He looked like a poverty-stricken laborer, and he intended to ask shelter for the night.

Before he could knock, the door was opened, and the woman, Clara, appeared before him.

"I know what you have come for," she said, before Chick could open his mouth to speak, "and I'll help you all I can."

"You know me?" queried the detective, in surprise.

"Yes. You are a detective."

"Who told you?"

"My husband, Frank Hurst."

"Did he see me as I came up to the d

"No; he saw you a mile down the road. He was hidden in a clump of trees by the roadside, and he ran all the way up here to warn his companion."

"Where is he now?"

The woman, or girl, more properly speaking, leaned forward and answered in a whisper:

"He is in the cellar."

Chick looked her squarely in the face.

She never flinched.

"I am telling you the truth," she went on, still in a whisper, "though I promised to say when you appeared that my husband and Mr. Burry had gone."

"Why do you betray your husband?"

Her face flushed, and Chick thought he saw the tears start.

"Because," she replied, in a voice that suddenly hardened, "because he has treated me brutally. I gave up everything for him, and I was willing to do his bidding in every respect if he would only let me follow him, and—and——" She faltered and cast down her eyes.

"Did he beat you?" Chick asked, compassionately.

"Yes, and worse than that. He said that he would kill me if I didn't leave him and go back to my aunt."

Chick compressed his lips.

"We'll put Mr. Hurst, *alias* Frisco Jim, in a place where he won't have a chance to kill you or anybody else," he said, grimly.

Then he added, quickly:

"I'll make a little bluff and then have you show me the way to the cellar."

"Very well."

The young detective went down the steps heavily, at the same time saying, in an ordinary voice:

"Much obliged for your information. I'll see you again soon, I hope."

He waited at the foot of the steps a few minutes and then softly ascended them again. vice

At the door a sudden thought struck him.

"Who lives here?" he whispered.

"Two old people, but they are gone away and won't be home for an hour."

"That's good."

He entered the little hall and passed to the living-room, the girl opening the door for him.

"The cellar is entered from a little room built off the kitchen," she whispered. "But you needn't go down there. We will go to the cellar door—it's a trap—and I'll lift it and call out to my husband and Mr. Burry to come up."

"That's a good idea, and I'll do the rest."

Mrs. Hurst led the way to the cellar door.

As she put her fingers in the ring to lift it, Chick took a position back of it, ready to pounce upon the men as they came up.

Mrs. Hurst tugged and tugged at the ring, but the door would not move.

"I'm not very strong," she whispered to Chick. "Perhaps you can manage it."

A dim suspicion of treachery flitted across the young detective's mind as she spoke.

But he went to her aid, nevertheless, feeling confident that he would be able to take care of himself in the event of a surprise.

The trap lifted easily under his manipulation, and the stairs descending to the cellar were disclosed.

Chick gave one look downward and was about to step away and let Frisco Jim's wife perform the service that had been agreed upon, when these words came in a hurried, appealing voice from the cellar:

"Come down quick, Clara; Jack's fallen in a fit."

Mrs. Hurst's face paled, but she hesitated not a moment in starting to obey the summons.

She had her foot on the topmost step and was apparently about to descend, when Chick, with the words, "I'll attend to this case," pushed past her and went down.

The cellar had a small grated window, but it did not furnish sufficient light for Chick to see about him distinctly.

Out came his bull's-eye as he reached the floor of the stairs.

But great was his surprise when its light showed him that the cellar contained no human occupant.

His view was unobstructed, for there was not an article of any kind on the floor.

He had been deceived by a cunning villain who possessed ventriloquial powers.

As he turned to ascend the stairs, the trap-door came down with a bang.

This was quickly succeeded by the turning of a key in a padlock.

"Trapped," he muttered, in his rage and discomfiture, after he had tried to force the door open and had failed.

The voice of Mrs. Hurst was now heard.

"You are in no danger, Mr. Detective," she called out, "for I have made my husband agree to spare your life."

"You played me a nice trick, didn't you?" Young Hercules growled.

"I had to. My husband's life was in peril, and I was forced to carry out his instructions."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone; went away as soon as you stepped into the cellar. He said he'd have to borrow your horse."

Chick made no reply.

But he did some hard thinking.

"Jack Burry went with him," Mrs. Hurst went on, "and they gave me orders to keep you here until to-morrow morning. When daylight comes, you will be released."

"Thank you."

Chick walked away in anything but an enviable frame of mind.

But he did not stay in the cellar all night.

Before nine o'clock he had forced his way through the grated window, the woodwork which held the bars being old and rotten.

Entering the house by the back door, after his escape, he found the sole occupant to be an old man of honest appearance who was sitting before a fireplace in the living-room reading a newspaper.

He was both surprised and alarmed at Chick's entrance.

An explanation followed quickly.

He had been away all day, and returning in the evening, found Clara Hurst in the house.

"I never saw her before," he said to Chick, "and I at once asked what she was doing here."

"Her story was that she was a resident of Meridian, and that while driving in a carriage with her husband, they had seen a man trying to pick the lock of my house."

"Her husband at once jumped from the carriage, caught the burglar, and put him in the cellar."

"The reason he did not take him to the jail was that he could find no ropes with which to tie him up."

"A likely story," remarked Chick.

"But after he had got the man in the cellar, he left his wife here while he went to Meridian to notify the officers."

"Did he return for her?" asked Chick.

"No. She got anxious over his non-appearance and went up the road to look for him. She never came back."

It did not take Chick long to clear his character in the eyes of the old man.

He managed to obtain a horse from him and returned to Meridian.

But no trace of the fugitives could be obtained there.

The following night he was in Mobile.

By Carter's instructions he visited Frisco Jim's brother, and partly by threats, partly by heavy bribery, he induced Bill Hurst to reveal the fact that Jim had been there, but only for an hour, and that he had left in the

morning train, with Jack Burry and Clara. Their ultimate destination was Sacramento.

"Start on their trail at once, Chick," commanded Carter, when he had heard this news. "As soon as I can move, I will follow you."

"Ver, well. Come as quickly as possible, and you will find me registered at the Golden Eagle Hotel, under the naime of Simon Hope."

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRAIL GROWS WARMER.

After Chick's departure, Nick Carter rapidly grew better. His splendid constitution stood him in good stead, and he was soon able to be about, nearly as well as ever.

After putting in a day in a vain endeavor to find the missing bundle of letters which he had hidden under a box on the street the night of the assault, Nick packed his traps and took a north-bound train.

A few days later the great detective found a surprising bit of news in a paper which he bought of a trainboy of the Union Pacific beyond Ogden.

A young woman had been stabbed and left for dead at Battle Mountain the day before, by a man supposed to be her husband.

The woman, who was young and pretty, had arrived at the little town a few days prior to the assault, and had been joined by her husband at the depot.

They registered at the hotel as Mr. and Mrs. Quinn, Chicago, and appeared to be a most affectionate couple.

The article wound up with these words:

"This morning the woman was found lying in her room in a pool of blood, and unconscious. When she came to her senses she said that her name was not Quinn, but Hurst, and that her husband had stabbed her because she tried to keep him from leaving her. The assault had occurred before daybreak, and the

assassin, after committing the foul deed, made good his escape."

When the train reached Battle Mountain, Nick got off and might have laid over for a day had he not been informed by the station agent that Mrs. Hurst was dead.

"Did she make any statement in addition to the one in the first dispatches?" the great detective asked.

"No."

"Are the town officers in pursuit of the murderer?"

"No. They went out the day of the killing, but when they found that Hurst had stolen a horse and started toward Sacramento, they quit the search and resorted to the telegraph."

Nick made inquiries at every station until he reached Sacramento, without hearing any further news of the murderer.

At the Golden Eagle he found the name "Simon Hope" on the register, but the clerk informed him that the gentleman had left town that morning, saying he would not return until the next day.

"Perhaps he left a letter for me," said the great detective. "My name is Nicholas."

"Yes, he did," and the clerk handed Nick a letter, the superscription of which was in Chick's familiar handwriting.

The letter was short, and ran as follows:

"Am hot on the trail. Jack Burry is at Rio Vista, a little town on the Sacramento River, in Solano County, and it is my belief that Frisco Jim will join him there to-night. There's some new game on foot. Come up on horseback, if you get this in time."

It was now four o'clock in the afternoon, and Rio Vista was forty miles distant.

But Nick knew the road, and believed that with a good horse he could make it in three hours.

A good horse was soon found, and when darkness set in Nick was within ten miles of Rio Vista.

He was riding along a lane near the river when a low, moaning sound proceeding from a dense growth of tules on the water side reached his ears.

Nick reined up his horse and called out, in a disguised voice:

"Where are you, and what's the matter?"

The moaning noises were repeated.

"The fellow, whoever he is, can't speak," thought the detective, and quickly dismounting, he secured his horse to a tree and entered the tules.

The moans continued as he pressed his way forward, and he was soon by the side of the sufferer.

He proved to be a powerfully built young man, and he lay on his side against a large log.

Stooping down to ascertain what injury he had suffered, Nick discovered that the man was bound fast to the log, and that a rude gag had been fastened into his mouth to prevent him from crying out.

Before he proceeded to act the part of the good Samaritan, Nick brought out his bull's-eye lantern and flashed its rays into the man's face.

An exclamation of surprise escaped him.

The man at his feet was a noted criminal whom Nick had run to earth several months before, and who, after conviction, had been sentenced to a long term in Sing Sing.

Removing the gag, he said, quietly:

"This is a queer place to meet you, Tammany Bland."

"It's a mighty rough place, Carter."

"When and how did you get out of prison?"

"When? Two weeks ago. How? That's telling, for I might want to work the trick again."

"How came you here?"

"Your partner double-banked me."

"When?"

"About an hour ago, I reckon."

"Tell me all about it."

Tammany Bland, ballot-box stuffer, gar-roter and burglar, shut his eyes a moment. Then he said:

"If any other man on your lay was to ask me to talk, I wouldn't say a word. But you always treated me white, Carter, even if you were the cause of my getting a tenner in Sing twice."

"I did my duty, and I did not exceed it," said Nick.

"I know, and I don't blame you. I was on one side of the fence, you on the other, and business is business. Well, I came out to California for my health, and yesterday, when I was down to cases and lying low, who should I meet but an old pal of mine."

"Who was he?"

"That's a leading question. I am not squealing on him, I'd have you know."

"Was it Frisco Jim or Jack Burry?" asked Nick, carelessly.

Tammany Bland gazed at the detective in surprise.

"Then you know——"

"I know a great deal, and if I say that you and Jim and Jack intended to do a job at Rio Vista to-night, I wouldn't be far out of the way, would I?"

"No, confound you, Carter, you wouldn't."

"Then open up, for evasions won't help you. Tell the truth and perhaps you won't have to serve two terms instead of one."

"That's good advice, and I think I'll follow it."

"You always had a grain of sense in your composition, Tammany."

"A mighty small grain," grunted the desperado, "or I wouldn't be here."

"Come, talk fast," said Nick, impatiently, "for I'm in a hurry."

"All right. There was a job put up for to-night, and Jack Burry, the pal I met in

Sacramento, is at the head of it. He had it all fixed up when Frisco Jim appeared."

"Then he saw you before Jim showed up, did he?"

"Yes. He expected Jim, but wasn't sure of his appearance in time. So he was mighty glad when he run against me."

"What was the job?"

"To rob the safe in the office of the Transportation Company."

"Did the three of you start from Sacramento together?"

"No. Jim and Jack went ahead. I followed in an hour, and we were to meet on the river landing a short distance below the warehouse at nine o'clock."

Nick looked at his watch.

It was half-past seven, and he had ten miles to ride.

"I can give the fellow fifteen minutes more," he thought, "and then I must hurry on."

"What was your part in the programme?" he asked.

"I was to act as outside guard, while Jim and Jack went inside and cracked the safe."

Nick considered a moment.

Suddenly a bold scheme occurred to him.

If he failed to meet Chick, he might yet succeed in capturing the two robbers.

The night was as dark as Erebus—a circumstance greatly in favor of the successful carrying out of his scheme.

A few more questions, and he was ready to proceed.

"Tell me about your meeting with Chick, Tammany."

"I was walking along—I had to foot it, for I had no horse—when Chick rode up and covered me with his gun."

"Did you surrender without a fight?"

"Not much. I whipped out my own shooter and we blazed away at each other. I got a ball in the leg, while your partner got off without a scratch.

"As I fell over, Chick leaped from his horse right on top of me. Of course I had no show with him, being wounded.

"After he had bound and gagged me and fixed up my hurt, he dragged me into the tules and left me. And that's all."

Tammany Bland was clean shaven and wore his hair closely cropped—the prison cut.

Nick had started out on his journey with a wig and false whiskers.

These he discarded, and arraying himself in Tammany Bland's slouch hat and coat—the latter a large, long-tailed, old-fashioned, tan-colored garment—the great detective remounted his horse and rode rapidly away.

It was his intention if he failed to find Chick before the robbery took place, to personate the escaped convict.

But he did not leave Tammany Bland without tying him up and replacing the gag in his mouth.

At five minutes to nine Nick arrived at a point a quarter of a mile from the warehouse.

Here he left his horse and pursued the remainder of his journey on foot.

Tammany Bland had informed him that a peculiar signal to announce his approach had been agreed upon.

Nick gave the signal when he came within sight of the warehouse.

It was answered by some one within the building

Nick then hastened forward with confidence.

He was soon on the platform, which occupied the space between the warehouse and the river.

Advancing cautiously toward the side of the building whence the voice in answer to his signal proceeded, Nick saw an open window and the form of a man inside.

At that moment some one stepped around the corner just beyond him and called out, in a menacing voice:

"Throw up your hands, or I'll shoot."

The newcomer was neither Chick nor either of the desperadoes he had come in search of.

Nick thought rapidly, and believing that he understood the situation, he quickly elevated his hands.

The next instant a pistol shot rang out, and the man who issued the order to the great detective gave a yell of pain and pitched forward to the ground.

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER'S ROUND-UP.

Frisco Jim had parted with Jack Burry at Battle Mountain, promising to meet the latter at Sacramento two days later.

He had made the stop to get rid of his wife.

Though he had had positive evidence of her fidelity and devotion, he yet considered that she would be a drag on his movements, and that his chances of detection would be increased fourfold if she remained with him.

Besides, he did not love her, and as he expressed it afterward, "When I found her fortune was tied up so I couldn't get hold of it, I had no use for her."

In the hotel at Battle Mountain he brutally informed her that he intended to leave her, and that he never wanted to see her again.

A terrible scene followed.

The unfortunate, misguided girl, clung to his neck and refused to let him go.

At last in his anger and desperation he stabbed her to the heart and fled.

On reaching Sacramento he was gratified to learn that Burry had concocted a scheme of robbery which promised a rich return.

This was the cracking of the safe of the Transportation Company at Rio Vista, and with the assistance of Tammany Bland, whom Burry had met before Frisco Jim's arrival, the job was looked upon as an easy one.

The night watchman was making his rounds between eight and nine o'clock, when

he was set upon by Frisco Jim and his partner and quickly bound and gagged.

The attack had been made from behind, otherwise he might have made a desperate resistance.

Leaving him on the ground back of the warehouse, the two robbers waited in nervous impatience for the arrival of Tammany Bland, whose part would be to watch outside while they were occupied with the safe inside.

Nine o'clock, the hour appointed for Tammany Bland's arrival, came and the third member of the trio did not appear.

"He has missed the road, perhaps," said Frisco Jim. "Anyhow, we can't wait."

Burry nodded his head.

They had forced the lock of the office and had just entered when Tammany Bland's signal was heard.

"Now we're all right," Frisco Jim whispered to Burry.

They watched the disguised detective until he was close to the open window on the side, and Frisco Jim was about to ask him if everything was all right, when the sudden command for the false Tammany Bland to hold up his hands was heard.

Instantly Frisco Jim thrust his head out of the window and fired at the enemy.

As the latter fell, shot through the brain, Frisco Jim prepared to leap to the ground, but was stopped by these words, in a hoarse whisper by Nick Carter:

"Stay where you are, Jim. Maybe the shot has not been heard. Let me investigate."

"All right."

Nick, glad that his disguise had not been penetrated, hastened around the building.

At the back he was confronted by a roughly dressed man armed with a revolver.

Pointing it at the great detective's head, he was about to speak, when Nick threw up his hands with the quick whisper:

"I'm Nick. Don't raise your voice."

The pistol was instantly lowered, and its possessor, who was no other than Chick, stretched out his hand, which was silently grasped by his superior.

A few whispered words explained the situation.

Chick had reached the warehouse to find the night watchman bound and gagged.

He had not been observed by Frisco Jim and Jack Burry, who were then concealed in the brush by the river bank.

Quickly releasing the watchman, Young Hercules gave him certain instructions, which the brave fellow promised to faithfully carry out.

Both were to wait till the burglars entered the building, and then they were to approach the door by opposite ways.

The watchman had started to fulfill his part of the programme, and had just got around the corner of the building, when he was startled by the unlooked-for appearance of the pseudo Tammany Bland, whom he instantly conceived to be in league with Frisco Jim and Jack Burry.

What followed has been recorded.

"Now," said Nick Carter, when he had got his bearings, "we'll have them dead to rights in a few minutes if no unlooked-for accidents happen."

Leaving Chick, he hastened to the window. Frisco Jim was waiting anxiously for his report.

"All's well," Nick whispered. "We're half a mile from the village, and there's no one coming up the road. Sail in while I go back and keep watch to make sure."

At that moment Chick was in front of the door and not ten steps away.

Frisco Jim and Jack Burry saw their supposed ally hurry away again and then turned their attention to the safe.

But they had not been occupied two min-

utes before a low "hist" at the window made both start up in alarm.

"Half a dozen men are coming up the road on a run," whispered Nick Carter, as Frisco Jim came to the window. "The jig's up, I'm afraid."

Frisco Jim swore a frightful oath.

"Our horses are down the road," he exclaimed, "for we intended to make our escape that way and go up toward Frisco."

"That's all right," replied Nick, "for there's a boat down the river a piece, and we'll be all right, once we get into it."

They both rushed for the door.

Jack Burry opened it to fall into the arms of Chick, who flung him to the platform as if he had been a child.

Frisco Jim sprang out to assist his comrade, when a right-hander from Nick Carter sent him reeling backward.

Before daylight Frisco Jim, Jack Barry and Tammany Bland occupied separate cells in the Sacramento jail.

The next day an officer from Rio Vista came to the capital with a warrant for the arrest of two of the prisoners for the murder of the night watchman.

Nick Carter greeted the representative of the law with mingled emotions.

The trial of the two villains in California on the murder charge would probably result in their conviction, and the penalty would be death.

At the same time it would detain the two detectives in California for at least a month.

This was inconvenient, for Nick had important business in New York which demanded his immediate attention.

"My warrant for Frisco Jim's arrest for the murder of Cora Burchard will take precedence of the one held by the Rio Vista officers," he said to Chick; "but I don't like to show it while the evidence that I need to convict the murderer is still lacking."

"The bundle of letters, eh?"

"Yes. Frisco Jim hasn't got them."

This conversation had taken place on the sidewalk in front of the city prison.

Inside, the officer from Rio Vista was talking with the chief of police.

Nick Carter had asked him to defer the service of his warrant for an hour.

Suddenly the great detective said to his assistant:

"Chick, I've got an inspiration."

"A good thing to have, Nick, if you can make any practical use of it."

"I'll bet that slippery youngster, Frisco Jim's nephew, who lured me out of the hotel at Mobile, has got the letters."

"Shouldn't wonder."

"He may have been in hiding among the boxes and barrels in the street when I was having my encounter with Jim and Jack."

"Likely enough."

"And having no time to give them to Jim, on account of the arrival of Constable Hewitt, he carried them with him to his place of hiding."

"If he didn't give them to his father."

"I don't think he did. William Hurst is, I believe, of a better moral calibre than his son."

Nick went into the prison office, and, after inducing the Rio Vista officer to withhold service on his warrant for twenty-four hours, he proceeded to the telegraph office and sent a long telegram to the chief of police at Mobile.

In the afternoon the following answer was received:

"Have got the kid. He says he met Frisco

Jim's wife next day and gave a bundle of letters to her."

Full particulars came later.

The boy had been a witness of the assault on Nick Carter, as the latter had guessed, and when Frisco Jim and Jack Burry scurried off upon the appearance of Constable Hewitt, he ran to the spot where Nick had hidden the bundle of letters, secured them, and hurried home.

"They'll collar me, sure," he said to his father, "now what must I do?"

"Hide in the swamp," was the reply, "until the affair blows over."

And to the swamp the boy went.

He took the bundle of letters with him, not thinking of them while talking with his father, so great was his excitement.

The next day William Hurst met Frisco Jim's wife.

She came to his house in search of her husband, and being informed of the occurrences of the night before, at once asked to be taken to the boy, believing that he could give her information not possessed by his father.

She saw the boy alone, and upon her statement that she intended to find her husband and stay with him, the lad gave her the letters.

"I don't know what's in 'em," he said, "but they must be worth something to uncle, or that detective wouldn't have been so anxious to hide 'em."

Clara Hurst read the letters in her room that day, and then started for Meridian, Jack Burry having written from that place last.

Why she never told her husband that they were in her possession Nick could only conjecture.

"Probably," thought he, "she intended to ask him who 'Cora' was before telling him that she had the letters, and the opportunity to do so never came."

The morning after the receipt of the Mobile telegram Nick Carter was at Battle Mountain examining the effects of the murdered wife, which were in the possession of the Coroner.

What he discovered may be inferred from the following telegram which he sent to Chick:

"Have found the bundle. The case against Frisco Jim is complete."

CHAPTER IX.

NICK READS THE BUNDLE OF LETTERS.

The reading of the letters occupied over an hour of Nick Carter's time.

But the time was well spent.

All were written by Jack Burry, some before the robbery of the Minneapolis bank, and some after.

Every one contained a reference to this affair, while one in particular spoke of the place where the tools had been stored and also of the disguises which Burry had secured.

One of the disguises mentioned was identical with that assumed by Frisco Jim in Mobile at the time Nick met him in the role of the horse trader.

But the one which interested the great detective the most and which was written a week before the murder of Cora Burchard contained these words:

"If I were you I wouldn't get too thick with a woman. In our business such foolishness don't pay. Your Cora may be a nice piece of goods, but if you know when you are

well off, you'll give her the cold shake and get away from Mobile. Of course, you destroy all my letters. You used to have the risky habit of keeping them, but you promised to reform your conduct in that respect."

"Now I've got him," said Nick to himself, as he tied up the bundle. "These letters, added to the testimony of the old blind woman and the brother of the murdered girl, ought to convince any ordinary jury that he is the murderer."

But Frisco Jim was never tried for the crime.

While on his way East in charge of Nick Carter, the train met with a terrible accident by the collapsing of a bridge.

The great detective escaped with a few bruises, but the murderer of Cora Burchard was killed on the spot.

Nick had left Chick in California.

He returned in time to be present at the trial of Jack Burry.

The evidence of the two detectives, added to that of Tammany Bland, who turned State's evidence, gave the prosecution a strong case, and Frisco Jim's partner got a life sentence.

Congratulations were showered upon Nick and Chick from all quarters.

Superintendent Byrnes was among the first to greet the great detective when he returned to New York.

"You've done a great piece of work, Carter," he said, "for the death of Frisco Jim removes one of the most dangerous and bloody-minded criminals that ever infested the United States."

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain "Wanted for Embezzlement; or, What Became of the Treasurer."

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